

# Tackling the 'toxicity' of estate regeneration

Tonia Secker considers her firm's research with YouGov on the need for large-scale estate regeneration

The poll surveyed more than 2,000 members of the public about estate regeneration and their views on whether and how it can be delivered in a way that adequately involves residents and gains their buy-in and support?

This question is particularly pressing in London, where the Mayor has committed to ballots for residents on estates if redevelopment plans involving demolitions are to receive Greater London Authority (GLA) funding and where recent high profile resident-led campaigns in Haringey and Hammersmith & Fulham have derailed substantial regeneration projects. The need to garner local support and harness the energy of communities in support of development has never been greater – but how can this be done?

As the government's own Estate Regeneration National Strategy emphasised, adopting a place-making approach to regeneration can generate value for residents and the local community through improved neighbourhood pride, a locally informed housing offer, better connections to local opportunities and improved services. A truly collaborative effort is needed to make estate regeneration work well for current residents and help move the debate beyond gentrification to a resident supported vision for something new, and perhaps different.

The survey found substantial positive sentiment around the potential of estate regeneration to improve homes, neighbourhood and communities, revealing that 62 per cent of respondents were 'very positive' or 'slightly positive' about the community facilities and new homes that estate regeneration brings. However what became clear is that residents also have concerns about how much of a say local communities have in redevelopment plans.

The survey revealed a perception of very limited involvement in the consultation and development process, with just 11 per cent agreeing that existing residents are always told about any plans, and how those plans will affect them; only 9 per cent agreeing that existing residents are always consulted about any regeneration plans well in advance; and only 4 per cent saying residents are able to influence the outcome of a development.

This suggests a very strong public perception, rightly or wrongly, that estate regeneration is some-

thing 'done to' residents, rather than 'with' residents, and that the majority of consultation carried out does not properly engage residents in the plans.

But when it comes to the potential outcomes of estate regeneration, the survey's findings are considerably more positive.

According to the survey, 69 per cent of respondents broadly agree that council housing estate regeneration has the potential to create better quality housing for existing residents, while overall 53 per cent broadly agree that it can create mixed communities and better neighbourhoods.

Only 26 per cent of respondents believed that regeneration leads to local residents being replaced by wealthier people; although the results are tempered by a high percentage (49 per cent) who are either not sure or don't know, reflecting a degree of uncertainty about the outcome.

Overall, 62 per cent of respondents had a positive view of the outcome of council estate regeneration, against just 8 per cent who had a negative view.

Of course, this survey reflects general public opinion, rather than specifically those residents of council housing estates or those who have specifically been involved in a regeneration development of an estate.

However, it does counter the recent negative narrative that has built up around the estate regeneration process, supporting suggestions that the strong anti-regeneration message from campaigners, amplified by a sympathetic media, could be skewing perceptions and may not be representative of the wider position of the "silent majority" of residents.

Overall, the survey suggests that developers and their partners could do much to tackle the perceived 'toxicity' of estate regeneration if they focus resolutely on undertaking meaningful community engagement. And that the Mayor's ballot could yet prove to be a more positive driver of the regeneration process than many expected, if developments are well thought through and meaningful engagement that involves communities is undertaken from the outset. There is some evidence for this - in November 2018, Metropolitan Thames Valley Housing became the first housing association to secure a positive "Yes" vote in respect of the regeneration of an estate in Barnet under the aegis of the



Tonia Secker is a partner and head of housing at Trowers & Hamlins

Mayor of London's Estate Regeneration Resident Ballot policy. 75 per cent of residents voted in favour of the regeneration proposals.

To support these findings we have developed a booklet of articles and opinion pieces from industry experts to examine what works and what doesn't. What processes and methodologies are replicable? What different roles can local authorities take to help achieve the outcomes? What things can be done to detoxify 'estate regeneration' and facilitate the development of a new and improved generation of mixed neighbourhoods?

Our report addresses critical issues from empowering communities to engage in the planning process, to the importance of reputation and minimising the impact of disruption, to recognising the critical difference between "a unit" and "a home" in engaging with residents on the future of the place they live in. ■

The interactive report is available to view at:

